

A WONDER EXPLAINED BY GREATER WONDERS

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A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*"You drew near in the day that I called upon You: You said, Fear not."
Lamentations 3:57.*

HOW different are our experiences from our fears! This man of God had said, "When I cry and shout He shuts out my prayer." He had said again, "You have covered Yourself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through." He had added even to that, "Surely against me is He turned." But now he corrects his misapprehensions. Neither was prayer shut out, nor had God turned against him, for he joyfully confesses, "You drew near in the day that I called upon You: You said, Fear not." As much as to say—"Not only did You hear me, but You did come to me, not only did You hear *me* speak, but You did speak Yourself, and I heard You say—'Fear not.' Not only were You not turned against me as an enemy, but You did prove Yourself my friend by being my loving and tender comforter."

Brethren, if our experiences have so far exceeded our expectations and belied our doubts, let us take care that we record them. Do not let us suffer our lamentations to be written in a book, and our thanksgivings to be spoken to the wind. Write not your complaints in marble and your praises upon the sand. Let the record of mercy received be carefully made, accurately measured, distinctly worded, correctly dated, and so preserved that in years to come you may turn for your encouragement to it. Jeremiah tells us that on such a day the Lord drew near to him, David remembered God from the Hermons and the hill Mizar, time and place are elements of interest in the memory of the Lord's great goodness. Note the particulars, dwell on the details—abundantly utter the memory of the divine loving-kindness. Maybe, your children and your children's children may read the story of your experience for their learning, and nothing can be more fitting than that the fathers should thus lay up for their children. Even though that record should contradict yourself and bring the blush of shame to your cheek to think you should have so slandered your God, yet write it clearly, and let it stand to the Lord's praise and glory, and your own comfort in some future hour of need. Write it, write it in capital letters, "I said I am cut off, but I found it was not so. You drew near in the day that I called upon You: You said, Fear not."

Jeremiah seems to record this fact with a considerable amount of surprise. He marvels that God should have drawn near to him, for his condition was a very pitiful one. He was so low that life seemed ebbing out, and he groaned, "He has set me in dark places, as they that are dead of old." In my own estimation I give one of the chief places among mortal men to the prophet Jeremiah. He was sent of God to do a most painful duty, which could not bring any honor to him nor win for him the love of those to whom he ministered. He was sent to prophesy among a willful and disobedient people, who would reject his admonitions. Like Cassandra, he spoke true tidings and sad tidings, but he was not believed. He pleaded with erring Israel—oh, how he pleaded! No prophet is more pathetic than he. I sometimes read the book right through, and it is a good thing to do that with the books of Scripture, so as to get the run of them, and if you will do this with Jeremiah you will be borne away with the torrents of grief which swept over the prophet's soul. Yet how constant and steadfast he was in love to the very people who provoked and persecuted him; how he cries to God and pleads with Him on their behalf, as affectionately as if they had been the most grateful of children, and he had been the most rejoicing of parents. He was a grand man, that Jeremiah. He was as a mountain torrent, familiar at once with great heights and profound abysses, deriving force from his deep descents of woe. When he penned the words of our text

his sorrow had come to a climax. They had put him into an underground cistern—I was about to say into a dry well, only it was not dry. He sank in the mire up to the armpits. Reservoirs which at one season of the year were filled with water were frequently used at other seasons as dungeons, and poor prisoners were let down, far beyond all reach of light or fresh air, into such horrible pits, which were often knee-deep in miry clay. Maybe the time of water floods would come on, and the captive would hear the rushing of the waters down the sides of his prison, and feel it flowing over the floor into some lower reservoir, so it would seem to have been with the prophet, for he writes, “Waters flowed over my head.” The prophet’s case was deplorable, he was cut off from all sound of human voice, and let him cry as he might there was none to have any pity upon him. He was alone, forgotten, forsaken, refused by the many and abhorred by the few who were in power. Doubtless his spirit sank, and we cannot wonder at it. A strong-minded, passionate patriot who would have saved his country, saw himself put aside even from the opportunity to rebuke and to exhort; in the crisis of national calamity when he felt most necessary to his people he was put away. Then it was that the Lord drew near to him. When he was most reproached, and most persecuted of men, he had the sweetest sense of the nearness of the Lord whom he served. Beloved, I think we have read enough of the history of God’s dealings with His people to understand that this is His way—that if He ever is absent from His people, it is not in their time of direst need, and if ever He does reveals Himself to them as He does not unto the world, it is when they are forsaken of all outward consolation, and for His sake are made to bear tribulation. The tortured martyr, the banished Puritan, the hunted Covenanter, could each say, “You drew near in the day that I called upon You: You said, Fear not.” The fainting sufferer, the weary worker, the dying believer has each in like manner joyed in the nearness of the Lord. Is it not written, “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you: when you walk through the fire you shall not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon you. Fear not; for I am with you: be not dismayed; for I am your God”?

Whatever wonder there was in the heart of Jeremiah that God should draw near to him, you and I must have felt even greater wonder whenever God has drawn near to us. We have cried out, like David, “What is man, that You are mindful of him? And the son of man that You visit him?” It is to us a standing miracle that the great and glorious and thrice holy God should ever come and reveal Himself in a way of love to us insignificant, dishonored, guilty sons of men.

This morning my subject is, first, *an explanation of this wonder* that God should draw near to us. And then, secondly, *a further enlargement of that wonder*. I hope many of us can say, “You drew near in the day that I called upon You.” May the Holy Spirit refresh us while we call this experience to mind.

I. Let us set forth some sort of AN EXPLANATION OF THIS WONDER. God does draw near to men. He that fills all things communes with those who are less than nothing and vanity. The Eternal converses with the creatures of a day. He, who is inconceivable in the majesty of His nature, nevertheless permits us, who are but dust and ashes, to speak with Him as a man speaks with his friend. Why is this? I shall not abate the wonder if I somewhat explain it by mentioning other facts equally wonderful—great things, and unsearchable, drawn from the vast deeps of the divine working.

The first thought I would suggest to you is that *men have always been in the thoughts of God*. As we are taught by the Word of God, God has always had a very singular regard to man. Of the eternal wisdom we read, “My delights were with the sons of men.” Long before man was created it was in the eternal purpose that such a singular and specially favored being should be formed, and all things concerning covenant purposes and designs were written in that book into which angels may not look. I believe that from of old the creation and the sanctification of elect manhood was the apex of the great pyramid of the divine purpose, the focus of the divine glory, that for which all other things were made. There never was a time in which God in the thoughts of His heart was not familiar with man. Of old there was a covenant of peace on man’s behalf, and love everlasting dictated every line. “How precious also are Your thoughts unto me, O God!” When the time came for man’s actual creation those thoughts began to take a visible effect. You must have noticed what a different tone there is in the language of Moses when he reaches the creation of man. The world, the lights of heaven, the trees, the beasts, the birds, the fish, start into life at the almighty bidding, but when it comes to man a council is convened, and the three persons

appear, saying, "Let Us make man." Here is a clearer revelation of the Godhead, and of the inter-communion in the divine Unity. It is added, "Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness." There is something of the image and likeness of God in all that He makes, for the work always bears some trace of the Worker, but "Our image, after Our likeness," is not for the lion or the eagle, nor for the stars or the sun, but only for man. I read not concerning seraphim, nor any of the angelic hierarchy, that they bear the image and the likeness of God, but so it is written of man, "Let Us make man in Our image." There was always about man some high intent of God not then apparent, and indeed, never seen till He appeared who is at once God and man. In the creation of man the Lord always had an eye to that Man of men, the Lord Jesus, up to whom all things lead. In the formation of man God widened His communion with His creatures, He began for the first time to hold communion with a being who is only in part spiritual, and as to a part of his nature is linked with materialism. God communed with Adam, and thereby placed him in an honor, in which, alas, he continued not. It was a wonderful thing, that creation of man—I shall have to tell you a little more about it before I have done—but in the very fact that man was made in so special a manner there was a drawing near of God to man.

Afterwards all the providences of God worked for the creation and conservation of a chosen seed, the fetching out and the maintaining of a people separated from the world—a peculiar people, richly favored, towards whom all the thoughts of God were thoughts of love. "When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel" (Deut 32:8). Whether it was Shem, or Ham, or Japheth, these and their descendants were sent here and there where they might best subserve the interests of the kingdom of God. At this moment the whole conformation of humanity on the face of the globe bears a direct relation to the ultimate church of God. Thrones and crowns must all be subordinate to the main purpose of God concerning His elect, it has been, and it shall be so, even to the end. Depend upon it; the ultimate result of everything in politics has to do with the eternal purpose of God in reference to His church. Whether there are wars, or rumors of wars, or famines, or pestilences, whatsoever armies shall come or go, or dynasties shall rise or fall, all works to the one end. The wheels within wheels, all full of eyes, revolve not without purpose, but they move always in a straight line towards this end,—the accomplishment of the design of God in reference to His own elect. I do not, therefore, wonder that God should draw near to His people, when I see Him always doing so, and when I perceive that they are most upon His mind and nearest to His heart.

But secondly, remember that God has drawn nearer to us than we have as yet hinted at, in becoming *tenderly near in nature*. There was a day, in the fullness of time, when the Son of God took our nature upon Himself. Marvel of marvels! He that made all things became a babe at Bethlehem, bore all the weakness and infirmity of infancy, passed through all the growth of boyhood, arrived at a toilsome manhood, and then finished His life-course. Jesus did not wear a nature like ours, but He bore our actual nature—our flesh and blood. Sin is not of the essence of manhood, and Jesus had no sin, but all that is really manhood belongs to the Son of man, who is also "over all, God blessed forever." He became verily and assuredly man of the substance of His mother, and this day the next of kin to every believer is the Lord Jesus Christ. We say of Him sweetly what Naomi said to Ruth concerning Boaz, "The man is near of kin unto us." Jesus is our next kinsman. If I were in trouble in a foreign land, it would be pleasant to hear the voice of an Englishman, but it would be even more encouraging to spy out a neighbor, a fellow citizen of the same town, but most of all it would be cheering to perceive that a dear friend, a brother, a husband was to the front on our behalf. Such a near and dear friend is Jesus to each one of those the Father has given Him. See, here is your brother, O believer, a brother of such tender sensibilities, and of such quick sympathies, that in every pang that tears the heart He takes His share! Do you wonder, therefore, that when you call upon Him, He draws near to you? It is not like Him to hide Himself from His own flesh. It is not like the Son of David to wear a heart of stone towards His poor afflicted brethren. His nature is love itself. He will, He must, come to you that are in sorrow, and sorrow with you, and thus cheer your hearts, for not in vain does He wear your nature, and not in vain in that nature has He suffered and died for you.

Nor is this all, the Lord Jesus was *especially near to His people in the days of His life on earth*. He was no mere observer of men, passing through our midst, as an English traveler might pass through China or Tartary, seeing everything, but sharing nothing. It is very beautiful to my mind to reflect upon the nearness of Christ as man to men, for there are certain men who by temper, spirit, and behavior are a long way off from the rest of mankind. Look at your princes and your autocrats, they are scarcely to be seen with a telescope, they do not appear to be persons of like feelings with ourselves. Look at your exquisites, your men of pride, your men of pretended culture, who bear their heads above the clouds. But Jesus was the most manlike of all men. I could propound to you today the theory that Jesus was an Englishman, and prove it from many points of His character, if I did not know that He was of the seed of Abraham. Jesus of Nazareth is a Jew, but there is no Jewish peculiarity about Him. He is a man in the broadest, truest sense. It matters not to you or me what nationality He actually came from, for the most cosmopolitan of men was the Christ of God. I know several excellent men whom I love and revere, but I despair of imitating them, the color of their virtue has a tint in it peculiar to themselves. I am not made of such stuff as would ever work up into their fashion, admirable though it is. But I never thought thus concerning the Lord Jesus. I always feel that by His grace I can become like *Him*. He is infinitely superior to those admirable friends of whom I have spoken, and yet He is more imitable. The hill is higher, but in His case there are ways and steps which invite, whereas in the other case there are crags which warn us off. I have known good men with whom I shall never be thoroughly at home until we meet in heaven, at least, we shall agree best on earth when they go their way and I go mine. One never feels so with regard to the all-glorious Lord Jesus. There our cry is, "Nearer, my Lord, to You. Nearer to You." He draws us to Himself, and the nearer we come the more fully we appreciate Him. If Jesus came thus near to men in His life on earth, do you wonder that He draws near to them now?

Carefully notice that this was a nearness to *sinful* men. For, being here on earth, He did not select for His companions persons of high religious repute, men who practiced austerities, or severed themselves from common life. He went down among the fishermen of Galilee; He associated with poor people, uncultured and simple-minded. Yes, He dwelt among the sinful people, "Then drew near unto Him all the publicans and sinners for to hear Him." He ate and drank with them, till men said, "This man receives sinners, and eats with them." He made one at the social board where sat disreputable persons, He ate what they ate, drank what they drank, and kept up no distinction such as the religious teachers of His day judged to be decorous and needful. You and I are sinners too, and our Redeemer's nearness to the sinners of Judea meant nearness to us. Oh, it is wonderful, that blessed nearness of Christ to men and women. There were no moats and walls separating Him from men, but all comers were received, they advanced right up to His heart unchallenged, and they spoke into His soul as though they were familiar friends. Do you think it wonderful that today Jesus should draw near unto His own people when they are in their time of sorrow? I do not. Remembering the sweet familiarities of the Nazarene, it seems natural that He should manifest Himself to His own redeemed. With holy adoring gratitude would I say, "You drew near in the day that I called upon You," a favor to be exceedingly valued, but not altogether unexpected from such a one as the Friend of sinners.

Further, dear friends, Jesus Christ *came still nearer to us in His death*. How wonderfully near, Jesus came to sinful men when He was delivered up to His enemies to suffer death. To die at all was for Him the closest fellowship with man, for death, say what you like about it, must always remain a penalty for sin, and as such our Lord endured it. He did not pass through death as a necessity of nature, for it was no necessity of nature to Him, but He died of set purpose for the bearing of our sin, and the putting away of it by the endurance of the death penalty. Just think of it. Would you have supposed that Christ would come so near to us that He would be found in the felon's dock? Yet there He stood. Do you seek Him? Would you speak with Him? Will you go to the palace of the king, asking for Him? If you do, you must enter the judgment hall, for there He stands bound, accused, and tried. They charge Him with sedition and blasphemy! "He was numbered with the transgressors." There had been an entry made in the imperial registry of His name as a child, born at Bethlehem, and now a second registration must be made of Him, and He is entered in Pilate's book as a malefactor—one of three who on the same day were given up to be hanged upon crosses for their crimes. He was numbered with the transgressors in so effectual a way

that He suffered with them. Not only was the registration made, but the decree of Pontius Pilate was carried out—Jesus died in the common place of execution between two thieves. They put Him in the middle because it was the place of pre-eminence, He was judged to be the chief criminal. In the end of His life, He draws so near us that He dies among transgressors, “He made His grave with the wicked.” When they took down the carcasses of the thieves they removed His body also, and His remains were given up to His friends as the remains of one who had paid the last penalty of the law. It was not merely in appearance and name that all this was so, for though no sin ever touched the blessed person of Christ so as to defile it, and He remains forever one of whom the apostle says, “In Him is no sin,” yet there was a passing over of sin to Him, and by way of imputation He was justly numbered with transgressors, and justly put to death with them. “For the transgression of My people was He stricken.” “He bore the sin of many,” He was made “sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” This is coming wonderfully near to us. Sin is of all things the greatest divider between a holy God and an unholy creature, and if Jesus comes as our Beloved, leaping over the mountains of transgression, and skipping over the hills of sin, what is to divide Him from His poor, suffering, but sanctified and justified people? I wonder not that it is written, “You drew near in the day that I called upon You.”

He is now in heaven; turn your thoughts up to Him there. *In heaven He is still perpetually near us.* Beloved, He has carried our nature into heaven. The body of the Lord Jesus in glory is the same as that which was laid in the tomb. He sits on the throne of the Highest in that humanity which He received of Mary. The nail prints were visible while He was here after His resurrection, they are manifest still. “He looks like a Lamb that has been slain.” His wounds forever remind the saints of His finished sacrifice. And what is He in heaven? He is there as our Representative. He is member of heaven’s high Parliament for the sons of men, and He holds His seat as such. He is head over all things to His church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that fills all in all. What is He doing in heaven? He is not only representing us, but He is preparing a place for us, making a niche in heaven for you, a place in heaven for me, and all the while He is continually offering intercession for His people. “He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors,” wherefore “He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever lives to make intercession for them.” Oh, You blessed risen Christ, I am not astonished that You do come even to my bedside, and make the watches of the night bright to me with the glory of Your presence, since even the sublimities of heaven and all the sonnets of the seraphim cannot take Your mind off for a single moment from Your own chosen people. Remember how our Lord said of old—“For Zion’s sake will I not hold My peace, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof goes forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burns”? Always bearing our names upon His breastplate, always beholding us as engraved upon His hands, He is constantly so near to us that He cannot be nearer.

I have thus shown you, I think, why Jesus so readily draws near to us at the voice of our cry, but there is one more matter of which I would speak, and that is so deep and mysterious that I would especially seek the guidance of the Spirit of God before I speak upon it. Far be it from me to set forth mere imaginations. I would only speak as the Scripture warrants me. Jesus may well come near to His people, for *there is a mystical union which ensures it.* A divine doctrine, this, of which Paul says, “This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church,” and this in relation to the marriage union. As sometimes in the worship of the heathen they cried, “Far hence, you profane,” for only the initiated might draw near to that special mystery, so I feel inclined when I am speaking upon this to warn off all wanton ears and careless minds. There is a union between Christ and His church which can only be shadowed out by the union between a husband and his bride. I scarcely dare speak of it in words; it is so holy and divine. It has been said and thought, and I think correctly, that though Adam and Eve fell by the same sin, yet they came to it by different ways. Paul tells us in his epistle to Timothy that “Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.” She fell by being tempted and misled. But why did Adam eat? Was it not probably from excessive love of the creature, a love of his wife beyond his God, as great a sin as the other and perhaps more deliberate?

Milton, we believe, was no dreamer when he pictured Adam as meeting Eve after she had eaten the forbidden fruit, and saying to her—

*“I with you have fixed my lot,
 Certain to undergo like doom:
 If death consorts with you,
 Death is to me as life;
 So forcible within my heart I feel
 The bond of Nature draw me to my own;
 My own in you, for what you are is mine;
 Our state cannot be severed; we are one,
 One flesh. To lose you were to lose myself.”*

It was a desperate thing for Adam to do, to disobey his Maker and defy His wrath, but he felt he was so one with her that he would share her destiny. Will you now think of Him who is called the Second Adam? He could not sin, nor in any shape or form become partaker with iniquity, but when that church of His, which was His bride, that God had given Him to be His forever, had fallen, He resolved to maintain the bond which bound Him to her, and to suffer all the penalties which would inevitably follow—

*“Yes, said the Lord, with her I’ll go,
 Through all the depths of pain and woe,
 And on the cross will even dare
 Her bitter cup of death to share.”*

And so, never polluted, never Himself a sinner, yet out of infinite love, that love bottomed upon an eternal, mystical union between Himself and His elect, the great Head of the church came and deliberately took our nature and all the consequences of our sin, that He might be one with us forever. He went down to the depths with us, that He might bring us up into the heights with Himself, that there His enthroned bride should be forever with Him, a queen more glorious than eternity had ever seen. The church was taken out of the side of Christ, and in her case it may be fitly said, “The woman is of the man. The man is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man.” Christ and His church are no longer two, but one by a strange, mysterious union which He thus describes, “I in them, and they in Me.” Who shall separate what God has joined together? Now do you wonder that Jesus draws near unto His people? I should marvel if He did not, for would any of us wish to be away when our dear spouse is suffering? When her heart is heavy is not ours heavy too? In a true, conjugal love, such as I trust many of you feel, there is a degree not merely of similarity and of communion, but even of identity between the two that have become one. Now, we that are joined unto the Lord are one spirit, one by eternal union, and He must, therefore, draw near to us in a way of sympathy and fellowship.

II. I have tried to set forth this mystery as best I can; now I ask your attention for the few minutes that remain to THE WONDER ITSELF. What I have said makes it less surprising, and yet fills us with greater surprise. In one respect it makes it not wonderful, but in others it makes it more wonderful than ever, that God Himself in Christ should draw near to us.

In desiring you to notice the wonder itself I would remind you, first, that *by no means is this wonder at all contrary to expectation*, when expectation is founded upon an enlightened understanding. It is natural, it is necessary, that Christ should come near to a people whom He loves so well. Love is attractive. It may be that absence makes the heart grow fonder, but a fond heart hates absence as it hates the fiend, and so the heart of Christ tolerates not the absence of the beloved, and will not have it either, for the blood of Christ gives access to Christ, and the heart of Christ out of which that blood comes is never content until there is constant, intimate, unbroken fellowship between the redeemed and the Redeemer. Do you not hear Him say, “Father, I will that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am”? I say it is a great wonder that God should dwell with men, but it is not a wonder contrary to expectation.

But, dear friends, if you have ever enjoyed this communion, let me help you to describe it, that you may wonder at it. *What is the manner in which God draws near to His people in their time of trouble?* At times He draws near to us by a secret strengthening of us to bear up when we are under pressure. We may have no marked joys, nor special transports, but quiet, calm, subdued joy rules the spirit. To my mind, the best of states is the deep calm which comes of the peace of God which passes all understanding. I care not so much for brilliant and gaudy-colored joys, your neutral tints of quiet joy suit my soul’s

eyes far better. I will not ask to see the sun above me, but I will be content to feel that “underneath are the everlasting arms.” Do you not remember that when the burden came you feared it, but did not feel it, for the shoulder had grown stronger; when the need came which you dreaded so terribly, it turned out to be no need at all, for He who refused the meal also removed the hunger, He who denied the garment took away the cold. The secret sustenance of the soul by God is very precious. It is not observed of men, but therein the saints are made to magnify their God. That unseen casting on of oil upon the fire, behind the wall, is what we need, and it is a very charming way of the Lord’s drawing near to us in the time of trouble.

Furthermore, the good Lord often vouchsafes to His people in their time of great pain and weakness and weariness a doubly vivid sense of His love. It is not merely that they believe in that love as they find it recorded, though that is a very delightful matter, but they feel this love in the delight of it. They know beyond all doubt, and they feel beyond all question—“He loved me, and gave Himself for me.” The alabaster box which they were accustomed to hold firmly in the hand of faith is now broken by love, and poured out by enjoyment, so that the smell which was before latent now perfumes all the soul. It is wonderful what you can bear in suffering, and what you can go through in labor, when “a secret something sweetens all,” that secret something the love of God. It is dark, it is very dark. “No,” says that inner spirit that dwells behind the eyes, “I see clearly the Lord’s wisdom and love even in this dispensation.” It is cold and chill. “No,” says the soul, “I am warmed and comforted by the love of Jesus, the fire of love burns within me, I am even consumed therewith.” Do you know what it is to have the love of God shed abroad in your soul by the Holy Spirit? If so, then you know what it is for God to draw near in the day when you call upon Him.

At such times the Lord grants us a sensible assurance of His sympathy with us. We feel that every stroke of the rod comes distinctly from a Father’s hand, which does not afflict willingly. We look up into His face, and feel that like as a father pities his children so does He pity us. We enter into the sorrow of our Father’s heart while He is causing us grief, with greater grief to Himself. We come to feel what it is to be bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord Himself. Extraordinary expression, is it not, where one said, “The soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord your God.” We are joined unto the Lord, and know it by feeling His heart beat with our heart. It is a high degree of grace to be so in sympathy with God in His afflicting us that we would not have Him cease for our crying; let Him continue to do His will even though He cross our wills. Let our vine be pruned, yes, as sharp as may be, till it bleeds again, if the vinedresser sees that thus the clusters will be multiplied. Whenever you get there you will have well-near reached the end of your chastisement, it has already produced the desired fruit.

The Lord draws near to His people’s souls sometimes by a very speedy and remarkable deliverance out of the trouble under which they groan. He can draw near to you when you are plunged in poverty, and He can suddenly lift you to competence. When everything goes against you He can in a moment raise up a friend. When it appears that no chance or change can set you free He can Himself be your deliverer. Did He not bring up Joseph out of the prison and set him on the throne of Pharaoh? He can do the same with you if He wills, before your sun has gone down. Nothing is impossible with God. The deliverances which He has vouchsafed to His people, not only in ancient times, but in modern times, are such as to make us feel we dare not doubt, much less despair. “Trust you in the Lord forever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.”

I am not quite done, I want you to notice the text again, will you, please? If you will look at it you will notice that in the record there seems to be *some surprise concerning the memorable graciousness of God*. “You drew near in the day that I called upon You.” Then I suppose, there were other days in which he had not called upon God, or at least had not done so, so memorably; but in the first day when I called upon You, You drew near to me. Does not that give us a hint, as if he said, “I had neglected my God, I had failed to apply to Him, my faith had been asleep, but as soon as ever I awoke the Lord drew near to me.” Come, then, you that have treated the Lord badly, do not stand back through guilty shame. Though you believe not, He abides faithful, He cannot deny Himself. All your sins and all your wanderings have

not alienated His great heart from you. Return repentantly and begin again, begin from this day, and you shall find that He will at once bless you.

There seems to me to also be a *Nota Bene* here, a kind of hand in the margin to point out *the promptness of God*. “You drew near in the day that I called upon You”—the very day he called God came, no sooner the prayer than the answer. Oh, the blessed quickness of God. When David cried to Him, he says, “He rode upon a cherub and did fly, yes, He did fly upon the wings of the wind.” No pace is too swift for God to come to the deliverance of His people. He is slow to anger, but He is swift in mercy. Try it, you downcast and broken-hearted ones, try it today, and then come and tell us if it is not so. “You drew near in the day that I called upon You.” I shall expect to see some of you coming forward to join the church, saying, “It was so, sir. I no sooner began to pray than the Lord appeared to me, He brought me up also out of the horrible pit, and out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and He has put a new song into my mouth, and established my goings.”

One thing more, observe *the extreme tenderness of all this*. “You drew near in the day that I called upon You, and said, Fear not.” You remember that text, “He gives liberally, and upbraids not”? Here is an illustration of it. Why, I should have thought that when God came near to Jeremiah, He would have said to him, “O you of little faith, wherefore did you doubt?” It would have been a very gentle rebuke, but I should have expected as much as that. And if the Lord had come to Jeremiah and said, “You neglected to call upon Me, and therefore you fell into this trouble,” who would have wondered? But no, the Lord’s whole thoughts were about His dear child, and He said nothing to him to wound him, but everything to comfort him. Tenderly He cried, “Fear not!” You mothers leave your children for a little to play together when you are at work in the house, and presently you hear a crash and a cry. One of the children has met with a heavy fall. He was climbing where he ought not to have gone and he has had a serious tumble. One child cries, “Mother, Johnny is killed!” Well, you know if you inquired into the matter you would find that Johnny deserved blame, but you do not inquire. You rush to pick him up, you notice that bruise on his forehead, you are fearful for his legs and arms, and you are ready to faint as you notice that he is bleeding. Do you scold him? Ah, no, you fall to kissing the poor child, his fault is passed by, you only think of his pain, your only concern is about him. And so it is with our gracious God. He comes to His poor, suffering, downcast people, and what He says to them is not—“You should not have done so and so, this is very wrong of you, I must terribly correct you.” No, but He says, “Fear not, I have forgiven you, and I will deliver you.” Remember the father in the parable when the prodigal came back? Did he lecture him upon his immoralities? Did he say a word about his ingratitude and folly? He did not notice his pimpled face, and point to his blotches as the result of his excess in wine with his riotous companions. He did not point to his rags and tell him that these came from his degenerate expenditure. No, he said not a word of upbraiding, but only, “Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; put a ring on his hands and shoes on his feet.” That is just what the heavenly Father will do and say if we call upon Him, therefore let us call upon Him in truth from this moment, before we leave the pew, and may the Lord cause us before long to say, “You drew near in the day that I called upon You, and You said unto me, Fear not.” God bless you dear friends, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—LAMENTATIONS 3:1-33.
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—27, 34 (PART 1), 627.**

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